

# the SELWYN review

Creative Writing and Artwork from Selwyn House School

2005-2006



Volume One



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**the SELWYN review**

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# Editorial

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In the seventies and eighties, Selwyn House School published a yearly literary journal called *The Fourth Dimension*, named for the dimension of space-time Einstein added to his theory of relativity. That journal featured student writing from over the school year including poetry, short stories and creative non-fiction. Creative writing has always been an important part of our English curriculum, and, as English teachers, we are often impressed by the quality of work submitted by our very busy students. We are pleased, this year, to relaunch this important literary tradition at Selwyn House.

This issue features some outstanding pieces of writing. We have the winners of our spring Illustrated Poetry Contest with free verse from grade 11, blank verse from grade 10 and sonnets from grade 9. We also have work that our students submitted to the Commonwealth Essay Competition: Patrick Levy's essay "The Difference I Make" placed second; and James Shannon's story "A World Apart" was highly commended.

The student voices included here have a decidedly international flavour. With stories and poems set in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Main Street, Winnipeg and Hallandale Beach, Florida, these young writers approach global, local and personal issues with sensitivity and insight, reminding us of the power of language. One of the best things about reading good writing is that it inspires good writing, so clearly these pieces reflect and extend the rich diversity of our students' educations. We hope that you are as impressed and inspired by these pieces as we have been. We look forward to literary contests and submissions for next year's edition.

## **Master of the Sand**

When the merciless Montreal winter has buried  
the green soil, and hope is surely lost,  
I remember a distant time and place where neon lights flashed  
burning hope against the mesmerizing seas,  
whose waters faithfully curled toward shore with dreams  
of their own.

For three eternal hours I'd sit, for time goes slowly  
when you're young, and life seems endless and  
pointless as the indifferent horizon that stretches always  
out of reach 'til touchdown in the promised land of swaying  
palms and some ancient mariner's dream of blood-dark  
inky seas.

Humid sea-damp mists enfold me and suddenly I am  
home at last where crustacean corpses  
litter the sand beneath my unshod city feet; again the  
wind and cloud and waves repeat a rhythm old as  
time, and I am lost in its siren song that wails:  
the sea is master of the sand.

In domes of glass and stone and steel, where people's souls are  
bought and sold and plundered pleasures come  
and go, the siren's warning haunts me still. Odysseus, brave  
master of the seas, undone by what you failed  
to learn: you were never more than a memory, for the sea is master  
of the sand.

I know I'm nothing—nothing more than crest and trough. This  
wind, these waves, dictate all that I'll ever  
be—the sum of my existence this: the swaying palms, the mariner's  
dreams, the siren's song that softly screams:  
embrace all that you never were, for sea is master  
of the sand.

**FIRST PLACE  
GRADE 11**



*Lawrence Said*

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## Neon Sunrise

The steady requiem of the street  
drives the quisling thinker home to raging waterfalls.  
Flower and veil, monster of divine architecture,  
gentle hand outstretched over a towering metropolis  
of steel and rust, splendor and treason,

scent of a woman, masquerade of gasoline and  
cigarettes:

It is a time of calm pestilence and possibility.  
The wondrous and caressing beauty of the sun fades,  
and madness strikes, under twilight temptation.

Kings and fools upon sculptor's wings  
sail through a vastness of impossible figures:  
broken bottles and screaming strings of mechanical poets  
recite the angelic rhetoric of night.

In the distance, a street lamp, lone and twisted,  
bleeds quietly beside a beggar too troubled to shut his eyes,

his beautiful dulcinea at his feet  
Sordid complexion, walnut eyes...sing me a song.

The pounding of a night club, the smell of liquor and drugs,  
the silent reverie of neon corridors,

an awakening of hopeless melancholy.  
In this diamond light, so masterfully complacent.  
Alive with the celestial softness of solitude  
of boundless reason and insanity  
the elegy of silent screams and glorious memory  
echoes through paper walls...

**SECOND PLACE**  
**GRADE 11**

*Brendan Cheong*

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## **Grandmother**

A grey evening a monochrome lit sky  
the delicate breeze with a singing chime  
mother father sisters uncles surrounding  
the brown-stretched parasol  
grandmother stationed there quietly  
the light-faded azure of the pool  
waving reaching

pray is the only word that rings  
that is the only thing we can do

the pool is stained with leaves and dust  
black and dry too  
her body is stained just like that  
but no net to scoop it away  
nothing can

a clamour of laughter  
anticipation and eagerness

grandmother is holding a sister's hands  
tracing her old, fragile finger across each groove  
whispering to the owner fortunes untold  
I wondered what mine would be  
she beckons me over to her seat  
I shyly hold my hand to hers  
she skims over my palm  
her ancient fingertip comforting

she smiles  
looks up at me with quiet joy

you will live life with no troubles

you will be okay don't worry  
my heart grips and clenches tight  
if only I could give my future to her  
but heaven already has called

she leaves my palm still with her happiness  
and that ancient feeling her warmth  
vanishes from my reach  
goodbye



*Grandmother* Brendan Cheong

**GRADE 11  
THIRD PLACE**

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## Angels Over Biscayne

They were, in a word, “freaks.” People came as much for the food as to gawk at these singularities of the human species. Michael was the head busboy at Bagel Cove. He’d worked there, legend has it, since the early seventies. A six-foot-seven colossus with shoulders as wide as a small trailer house, Michael was the enigma of Biscayne Boulevard. Some said he was an exiled drug lord from a small South American country. Others heard he’d been a LSU lineman who seduced the Dean’s daughter. Still, others claimed he had escaped from the heart of darkness, fleeing the Belgian Congo with only the shirt on his back. Of course, I have my own theories.

The Bagel Cove Restaurant and Delicatessen lies a few miles inland from the North Miami strip, right off the palm-lined strip-mall heaven known as Biscayne Boulevard. It is here the elderly meet over mini-Danish to recount their glory days hustling on St-Urbain or Seventh Avenue back home. Like knights of yore gathered around their round tables, retired *shmatte* kings replay deals made and broken when South Beach was a steamy swamp and a bagel still cost a penny. Hooked deep into their tales, I remind myself this dragon-slaying took place in a time when high-rises were low-rises and when money mattered, but not as much as reputation.

The Bagel Cove belongs to the Shmatte Kings, as well as to Hallandale’s finest who swagger in with their shiny, holstered Colt .57’s and polish off platters of pancakes as big as a head. Michael greets all who enter with a quiet dignity befitting a head of state or religious order, and has earned in return the awe and respect of the deli-going community of North Miami Beach. In a land built on swamp and sewage, a place where nouveau-riche sally down to blow their newly-found buckets of money, a southern waiter whose ancestors were slaves has become Biscayne Boulevard’s latter-day archangel, flying high in the city’s polluted air, dispensing Ashkenazi ambrosia to all who will receive.

No one’s ever been able to nail Michael’s mystique. However, something really big has recently caused me to question his legitimacy. Robert was the host at Wolfie Cohen’s Rascal House, a better, ritzier deli than the Bagel Cove. So the story

goes, sometime in the early fifties, Wolfie rode the rails down south to panhandle, with nothing to his name but loose change and a recipe for a blintz he claimed was handed down from King David himself. While the blintzes were an overnight sensation, Robert had the magic touch that kept it that way. According to local legend, Wolfie met him while defending Pearl Harbour from the Japanese. Others speculated Cohen never even saw the war, claiming instead that Robert rescued Wolfie from a Maco attack, years back, in Fort Lauderdale. Others say nothing at all.

By the time Wolfie died in the early nineties, Robert had become the face of the famous deli, where he continued to greet Miami's hoods and heiresses with his loveable, but not-quite-right-in-the-head, grin. When Donald Trump and Gil Dezer put up the Trump Sonesta across the street, their autographed "To our good friend Robert" eight-by-ten was added to Robert's wall of fame beside the cheesecake counter. You can see why it made the lead story on Miami's evening news when Robert was plowed down in a hit-and-run on South Ocean Drive. He was waiting for the six-fifty-seven bus after finishing another day he proudly described as "in the service of the Rascal." Descriptions of the driver included "a burly black man with shoulders the size of barrel."

Conspiracy theories multiplied. The Shmatte Kings said Dolores and Daisy, the twins who parlayed a small textile inheritance into a North Miami landmark, put Michael up to it. Hallandale's finest seconded the motion, adding that Michael had connections to the Castro government going way back to the Bay of Pigs. Whatever the case, the Kings and the cops agreed that with Robert of the Dumbo ears and pants pulled up to his ribcage, out of the way, the Cove would make chopped liver out of the Rascal once and for all.

"A Bagel Cove bagel is truly a treat; a Bagel Cove bagel can never be beat": You see how Michael's famous ditty, posted beside the takeout counter, sounds ominous now? This was the nail in the coffin though: the last time I sailed into the Cove, I discovered that Michael disappeared days after Robert's death. So . . . was Robert really dead? Maybe Michael has him tied to a chair in his inland Floridian basement.

The truth in all of this is that I understand these characters that have grown so close to my heart during my years gallivanting down South. Some life forms are just so beautiful and perfect in their simplicity that it seems a gargantuan injustice not to romanticize them in one's own mind. Michael, the giant waiter as mysterious as the Rascal's blintz recipe; Robert, the man-child who was loved then lost; and even the immortal hustler and blintz king, Wolfie Cohen himself, are the icons of my youth. They made retirees on fixed incomes and world-weary billionaires feel like they were

entering the temple of King David. They made me feel that I was living in some crazy cartoon strip where assassins, hustlers and hangers-on mixed it up in this freak show built on sand and swamp. Was Robert just another freak who met his bit of bad luck on South Ocean Drive? Was Michael invented by the faithful of Bagel Cove Restaurant and Delicatessen? Listen, I don't pretend to think of Biscayne Boulevard as a rogue's gallery where saints and sinners play out some divine drama. Every once in a while, when I imagine Michael and Robert, united now, their bright wings soaring over the hungry and hopeful Miami Beach, I really do.



*Invisible* Andrew Funamoto

*Sammy Mihalcioiu*

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## **A Grey Main Day**

The morning lights the Mission window bright;  
a bushfire in my room? But no smoke is,  
however, rising from hazy prairies  
to fill my longing chest with sweet-grass smells.  
I keep my eyes still closed, why open? To see  
the grey on Main? The shabby wood for walls,  
which once were towering oaks bending wind?  
So sad they brought me in (the soup was good).  
“The man is frozen” said the priest. “Check the bag  
of glue.” I tried to say that it was empty.  
The last I sniffed, the dizzying air held a dream  
with rabbits, soft moss, mother’s songs and laughs.  
My neighbours laughed, I laughed so hard I coughed.  
A feather tickled me inside—I laughed,  
I coughed. I puked. The soup was good but not  
with glue. I was a proud man once: to hunt,  
to beat the drums, to lend my help to old  
Chief Ahmo’s crossing of the muddy road.  
At home I loved my dog, the Northern Lights,  
the bush, my life. Another day of grey  
Today, another day, a Main grey day.

**FIRST PLACE  
GRADE 10**



*Ryan Quinn*

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## **Nightly Vampires**

The flowing nights bring with them a cool breeze,  
home becomes farther and farther away  
and the days become longer and longer.  
Stars, moon and lights: a beckoning presence.

The streets are filled with scurrying people.  
At night, streetlights give some guidance to us,  
the young teenagers, who roam from light to  
light, like confused migrants trying to find  
home. Some meet others along the journey,  
like Jets and Sharks in our Spanish Harlem.

When day breaks, the lost vampires go home:  
that place where the all-encompassing light  
shines forever, where no shadow can spawn.  
This hushed sanctuary, their source of heat  
that melts the cold, blue ice that surrounds it.

The final chapter of this nightly flight,  
like sanctuary, daylight comes again.  
Providing these lost souls with warmth and sleep.  
Life upside-down. Ritually, this light,  
lost, conquered by the blackness of the night.

**SECOND PLACE**  
**GRADE 10**

## **Metal Kings**

The building slowly draws near with each step,  
anticipation rolling around like  
an angry butterfly inside my gut  
preparing for its chance to soar away.  
Piling through the horde like a voyage through  
A rough safari zone or jungle woods.  
Trip through the crowd of people dressed alike  
All waiting for this joyride to begin.

Stadium of excitement that echoes  
With cheers, a faceless noise that stings my ears.  
The amps are guards that only speak when told,  
just cages of sound that unite the room.  
Their gleaming eyes signal the crowd to list.  
The room goes dark: the crowd goes bright with joy.  
Their chants and screams like barks of hungry wolves  
only to be topped by the open note.

One note to calm or fire up the crowd.  
Two lights shine on, one red, one white: one point.  
As heaven and hell both combine as one  
to emphasize the power of these men  
on whom they shine for all to watch and learn.  
There they arrive, the kings of rock march in.  
Testosterone as present as the air  
They smile, they grin, no words, opening song.

The sea gets rough, the waves are tough, men jump.  
The smell of sweaty skin intensifies  
throughout the night with only more to come.  
The concert's done, the kings are gone, yet still

they linger on and stay within the men.  
My ears ring loud, my body hurts, voice sore.  
I walk, a soldier, back from battlefield  
belonging to an army of metal,  
stronger than gun, Damascus sword, or tank.

**THIRD PLACE**

**GRADE 10**



*Concern* Ross Gelber

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## One Last Time

The street is always quiet at night; it has been this way for a while now, long enough for me to get used to the aggravating silence – the madness of night is as short a folly of words as darkness is to the mind. Too many people have suffered for its cause. Of course, during the day it is different: as the sun rises every morning the air becomes sweet with the reckless laughter of children, and the market opens its arms to welcome the noisy masses. It is here that my brother Guirgis works, and soon his children shall as well. Every second month, I buy the fish he sells because my wife enjoys its coarse saltwater taste. Yes, it is much different during the day: the veins of the city are alive with blood and the people are given a chance, most of the time.

It is now 1984. five years have passed since the Soviet invasion. Our president, Ihmshir Waseb, has been overthrown and all that is left of the resistance has been scattered around the country. This resistance as they call it, with their banners and their “hope”, is nothing. They are the bearers of an emotionally shattered idea, and they have suffered its irreparable consequences; they are vengeful and they live only by their laws, doing with people as they please.

\*\*\*

It is the night before Ramadan, and all shops must close early. I hasten my step and begin to regret the cigarette I’ve just finished. As I pass the only gas station in town I salute a very good friend of mine whose name is of no importance. He shouts to me, but I cannot bring myself to understand what he is saying: I must get to the market before it closes. I am now running, for I have just seen the clock above the Meymaneh Royal Building and I have very little time. I taste the sweet-salty liquid in my mouth as it falls from my lip and feel its dampness around my arms. In the distance, I see my brother leaving on his bicycle and I shout to him:

“Wait, *ya rayes...*” I stop to catch my breath. “*gai ma’ak*, I’m coming.”

He turns his head and notices my silhouette. Luckily, I have caught him just before leaving, and I thank Allah.

“A bit late, no?” he asks in a deep voice. He always speaks that way. He has

since he was twelve.

"He just let me off from work. I told him about Ramadan but he knows nothing of it; he is an American," I explain.

My brother shakes his head and plays with the fabric of his jacket. It is obvious he has other things to do, and it would be disrespectful of me to waste his time.

"Have you any fish left? I promised Magda I would buy her some on this sacred night," I say rapidly.

He immediately pulls out a set of keys from his jacket pocket and finds the right one to open the padlock. As he lifts the steel grid, I shudder at the smell of rotten fish and wipe the sweat from my eyes with the sleeve of my shirt. My brother quickly takes me to the back and shows me the fresh fish. I hesitate for a moment and turn to my brother who smiles and hands me two snappers and a dozen shrimp. I invite him and his family to supper but he refuses and I have no desire to insist. As I leave the market, I thank him loudly and make my way home to see my wife.

\*\*\*

We do not live in a large home. It is of equal size to those of our neighbours. We have lived in it ever since we married, twenty blessed years ago. It is made of cheap concrete, reinforced with wood imported from Pakistan, I believe. Inside, there are two floors and a cellar, each separated by an aluminium staircase. We have a very small kitchen and few pots, a fact which has become the subject of many arguments, yet I pay no attention to it. In the dining room, we have a beautiful table which we received as a gift from our son; it is made of solid cedar.

I close the door behind me and I melt in the pleasurable scent of saffron and rice. My wife calls to me from the bedroom demanding an explanation for my delay. I simply tell her what I told my brother. She responds incoherently.

"I have brought the best fish *habibtee*," I say as I remove my shoes and walk delicately to the kitchen.

I lay the fish down on the small counter and permit myself to rest on a chair. However, I hear my wife coming down the stairs and rise to kiss her. She is wearing a dress I have not seen for many years and her hair smells of lilacs.

"You look beautiful," I say to her. At this she laughs, and kisses me lightly on the forehead. She moves to the kitchen to prepare the fish, and I take the dishes from the cabinet to set the table.

"Make sure to use the nice cutlery," Magda says to me in a soft voice. I can barely hear her over the fan of the stove.

From the dining room I notice that it has become incredibly dark outside, so I turn to check the time. It is nine twenty-four and I have prayed only twice today. I ask Magda if we will eat soon and she tells me it will be fifteen minutes. As I wait, I decide it wrong for me to sit, so I remain standing. I contemplate my hands noticing how ugly and wrinkled they have become in my old age. I find it amazing though how each wrinkle finds a path through the skin, never disturbing another and looping interminably around, only to end up where it started.

"*Cit'ee*, come to the kitchen," Magda says to me, much louder now.

I take the plates of rice and fish from her and bring them to the table. She opens a bottle of *nifsahaashi* I had brought back from Iran many years ago. She pours a glass for me then for herself, and we both sit at the table; I pray. There are not many things to wish for in this world, but there are many to be thankful for. I thank Allah for the meal, I thank Allah for my beautiful wife, and I thank Allah for the pleasure of living he has given us. I pray for a very short time, yet long enough to consider how blessed we are. When I am done, my wife is silent and she waits for something. I know not what. Then, she leans over her food and kisses me hard, and she is quiet again. We eat this way, in pleasurable silence, and every now and then I look at Magda and notice the pores of her skin and the delicate curve of her nose.

"Who are those men?" I must have jumped because she startled me. I give her a look of confusion as I pick up the pieces of rice that have fallen off my plate and onto the floor. My wife points towards the window, and I turn to see of whom she is speaking. It is very difficult to see at night, and I am not wearing my glasses; I can only make out the beam of two, possibly three flashlights. As the beams approach, I realize there are six men, six militia.

Looking carefully, I can see three of the men are holding guns, and so can my wife. I look back to her yet she cannot afford to look back at me, and I have finally understood. In a weird contortion of the limbs, I lift myself off the chair and race to the door. I lock it and take my wife by the hand. We look at each other very briefly, yet long enough for me to distinguish the capillaries crawling across the delicate whiteness of her eyes. The men are now at the foot of the door and one of them knocks with the butt of his gun. My wife screams and I am forced to cover her mouth with my hand.

"We must leave, now, and you must be quiet, do you understand?"

She nods very quickly and makes a bizarre face. I take her hand and lead her through the kitchen to the back door. The man knocks once more. I hear the crackle of the automatic rifle as he blasts the lock. The cold of night strikes me as we race from the back steps of our home into the garden. I am running too fast and my

wife cannot keep up. I turn to her, and see the men emerge from the house, laughing. They are not very old and they are not very brave. One of them is stroking his gun very gently. He is smoking a cigar. I notice another who has a small moustache. And then, I notice another, a very robust man, who has the eyes of my wife. I am afraid of this one, not for his size, but because he reminds me of someone, someone I have loved.

I turn around and begin to feel an uncomfortable heaviness in my feet; I am tired. I should not have had that cigarette. I stop, and for a moment I can no longer control my legs. I can no longer move, nor do I have the desire to move. My wife is screaming, yet I cannot hear her. I can only see the saliva dripping down her chin and curving slowly around her neck. Suddenly, the screeching of a thousand dying men echoes through me and I scream, holding my head in the palm of my hands. I try to shake the pain but I cannot and so I turn to my wife. The men have ripped her dress off and she is slowly being dragged into the house, fingers bloody and crusted from digging into the dirt. I look at her, I try to look at her eyes, her face, I try to comfort her, to smile at her, to hold her, but she is disappearing.

The wind hits me and wraps around my body, caressing me, holding me. I am happy. I feel my wife touching me and I can see her smiling. She is so beautiful, so innocent. She is wearing her wedding dress and she has done up her hair the same way she had when we got married: the way I like. She is kissing me and she is speaking a language I do not know. I look at her and she has the eyes of an angel.

Then, I see my son next to her. He is in his new uniform, prepared to die for his cause. He laughs with my wife and I watch them. I realize something: in this universe of sorrow and pain, I have been blessed. I have been blessed with something greater, something more powerful than hate or remorse. Now there is nothing anyone can do or say to take it away from me, ever. And so, I look at my family one last time and I laugh to myself. I laugh until my mind swirls into a prism of absurd colours and pictures, until the only visible barrier between hope and fear is the soft beating of a hummingbird's wings, and the gentle chuckle of a child.

## **Child in the Dark**

Each mountain peaked with a legend's story,  
Grace and tranquility  
like an infant sleeping.

Yama cured the mountain of its disease.  
With each day the mountain ceaselessly bled,  
And the once-yellow roses, now became  
Death's beacon, as they screeched a silent pain.

Wandering for redemption from his past,  
But his blood-stained body disallows him.  
Yama's sword searches for new victims to slay  
And he fears, he will quench his wild thirst.  
Like a child who fears the unknown dark.  
The horse has broken its legs, yet it runs.  
No longer a man, but a God who Zeus  
Himself fears like a child in the dark.  
His eyes were no longer green, but lighter.  
They became luminous as the sun,  
more frightening than the dark.  
The mountain soon took on a slumping shape.  
The eyes were the only source of light.





*Virgin in Blue* Kyle Burrows

## The Sweetest Moment

**I**t was unusually hot that day. The blazing sun blanketed the Saudi Desert with a sheet of blinding light, so that the soldiers would constantly rub their eyes in pain. The platoon had been ordered to stay in and secure a small town that now lay in ruins from bombings that occurred days before. Not a thing moved, it seemed, and in this abandoned town they were the ghosts; they were the living dead.

The young soldier took in one last, long puff from his Camel, released a cloud of dark smoke from his nostrils, and threw the cigarette towards a pile of rubble. He watched it as it fell towards the dirt: the smoke trailing clumsily, the red ash bursting into all directions as it hit the chipped rocks, most of which still had visible, foreign writing on them that had probably once read "General Store." He let a little chuckle escape. It was funny how closely related the fall of a cigarette seemed to that of a cruiser missile.

Bryan Flanner had turned eighteen the previous fall and had signed up to join the army, and more specifically what he believed to be, like his comrades, the War on Terrorism. Like the other young souls who joined in so willingly to fight in the desert, Bryan had developed a powerful hatred for the Muslim regime, and the catastrophic terrorist attack of "Nine-eleven" had only fuelled that loathing for the Arab world. With the help of the media, the young man had quickly adopted stereotypes about the people he was now fighting. He had believed he was ready to kill for his flag with an almost zealous patriotism. His hatred drove him to exceed expectations during training and all he could think about was killing the "bloody Arabs"—something he so desperately wished he could take back now.

He had changed with the first firefight, the first deafening screams and gurgling moans, the sounds of flesh being torn by bullets and shells, the smell of burning corpses, the sight of dead children, almost naked, on the streets. It had been too much, the things he had seen. And it worsened as time went by, haunted

his dreams—of course only when he did manage to find some form of sleep—and tormented his mind every day. He had grown a desire to kill the enemy, but when the time came to do so, it was a whole different story. He saw in them what he saw in himself: fear and pain. They bled as he bled, and screamed as he would have if dismembered. How could he kill those who seemed so close to him now? There was, obviously, no other choice: in war it was kill or be killed, without question.

He remembered vividly the night where a group of vigilante young fighters strongly opposed to U.S. presence assaulted their camp. Many of his friends had been injured—two were killed—and Bryan had never been so frightened. He had emptied all of his magazine, spraying a cloud of bullets almost blindly. After a battle, it was custom to look for survivors of the enemy faction and “finish” them. Bryan had not been ready for this style of execution. He caught up to one of the men he had shot who lay squirming and screaming his lungs out, turned him over, and steadied the barrel against the child’s head: the kid was clearly no older than sixteen and the fear and pain Bryan had seen in his eyes that night was unbearable. Then Bryan had pulled the trigger.

He sat there now, back against the rusted frame of the assault Humvee, staring at the fallen Camel and contemplating, and he lay there for almost fifteen minutes, in a trance-like state. It was only when the far-off explosions and crackles from guns could be heard that he snapped out and came back to reality. He raised his M-4 carbine and checked the cartridge to count the bullets: twelve left. Bryan searched the pockets of his vest only to find he had no spare clips and so he got up slowly, opened the back door of the truck and started rummaging through the supplies, making a loud racket that earned him blank stares from his company. He found one of the twenty-two calibre, thirty-round clips he was searching for and slammed the door. He got back to his resting place and switched the magazines of his gun, clicked the new one firmly in place, and then closed his eyes.

“Wake up, Flanner, you dumb bastard!” a voice yelled. “Let’s go, we’ve been called as backup in Al Hillah. We’re moving out in a couple of minutes.”

Bryan opened his eyes and looked into Jason’s eyes. The two had signed up together and become close friends since their duty. Unlike the latter, Jason was high spirited and always cracking jokes when the company’s spirit was down. Most wondered if he felt any sorrow or pains with regards to the war, to the killings. Some

thought he had no emotions, others thought he hid them, but only Bryan knew, only Bryan had seen him cry at night and whimper.

"What the hell d'ya want Jay? For once I can get some sleep in this shit-hole and you, of all people, wake me up."

Jay gave him a soft kick, "There's no sleep in hell, buddy. Pack up, sweetheart!"

Bryan watched him walk away towards the others and say something, to which all of them started giggling. His tongue was dry, and he realized how thirsty he was and so reached into his backpack to uncover his bottle, half-empty. He drank some of the water, keeping the rest for later. In here, in hell, it was not like the materialistic America he knew. He had learned the meaning of keeping rations. God, how he longed to drink a beer, he thought. His eyes shifted to his gun. He got to his knees and put it over his shoulders, then checked his equipment: his dog-tag, knife, the contents of his bag and pockets, his helmet: everything was there and ready. The young soldier got up, adjusted the straps of his bag so that they were comfortable, and walked sluggishly towards the others.

"Bryan, don't forget your head," a girl's voice said. She came close to him, took the helmet he held from his hand and put it on his head and slapped the top affectionately, then she came closer to kiss him on the forehead, "Always wear it, you know that."

Anne was the only girl in the company, and she was a girl of striking beauty. No one bothered her, however, and she ordered as much respect as anyone did. She did not let anyone get close unless she wanted and to the guys there was no tension created by the difference of sex: to them she was as much a "brother" as any other guy was. They would talk without restraint in her presence, and she would laugh. In exchange for this respect they gave her, she would never cozen the guys for her own needs. She was a soldier as much as they all were.

The sergeant came in between the group and explained the plans for their assault. The soldiers split themselves up and hopped in the three Humvees, Bryan getting in last, in his usual torpid manner. It would be a two hour drive to Al Hillah, and this time Bryan would not sleep.

When they got there it was chaos. The fighting had been going on for a day already. Everywhere foundations were crumbling and the ground was smoking from shell-holes. The dead were littered all around, and the screams of the living resonated all over, muffled by the heavy crackles of gunshots, the whizzing of bullets and

booming of explosions. As soon as the Humvees stopped, the soldiers dashed out, guns ready. Bryan tripped on something soft and as he shifted his eyes to the cause gasped in horror. A fellow soldier in what could have been his early twenties was moaning. His entire lower body, up to his torso, was severed. He looked into Bryan's eyes and seemed to mumble something, but he could not hear it. The dying man tried to reach a handgun on the ground but it was too far, and, understanding, Bryan gave it to him, and the man held it to his own temple and pulled the trigger. This was too much, and the young man started to run blindly.

"What the hell are you doing!?" Jason's voice could be heard, "You're gonna get yourself ki—"

Bryan stumbled and turned around, his face contorted with horror. He could see, not more than fifty feet from him, Jason falling, one hand holding his throat, now shooting blood like a stream, and one arm reaching out for him. When Jay's body reached the ground, Bryan screeched and started running towards him, though his watery eyes prevented him from seeing much. In a sudden, unreal moment he felt a sharp, piercing pain shoot through the back of his neck. Blood started to pour out from him like a fountain, and the young soldier fell down on his knees slowly only to collapse on the blood-stained sand.

Everything slowed down. He could still see his friends screaming at him, and he caught a glimpse of Anne crying, staring towards him. Images of his mother, of his sister started to flash. There were no more guns where he was going, there were no more deaths, no more blood. It was a place of beauty, a place of calm and peace. He saw himself now, playing as a child in the park while his mother watched and smiled. His breathing started to slow. He saw his teacher in elementary, and the other children laughing; how he wished he hadn't made fun of him. He could almost hear the lullaby his mother used to sing when he was a child. And he saw Anne. With what little strength he could draw from his final heartbeat, he smiled, and a tear dropped onto the sand, disappearing through the gaps between each grain into an unknown abyss. This was the sweetest moment. When in hell, there is nothing sweeter than death.

*Brian Lin*

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## Etude

I sit in a hall before an ensemble of musicians.  
Like them, I am tuning  
My instrument –  
My life.

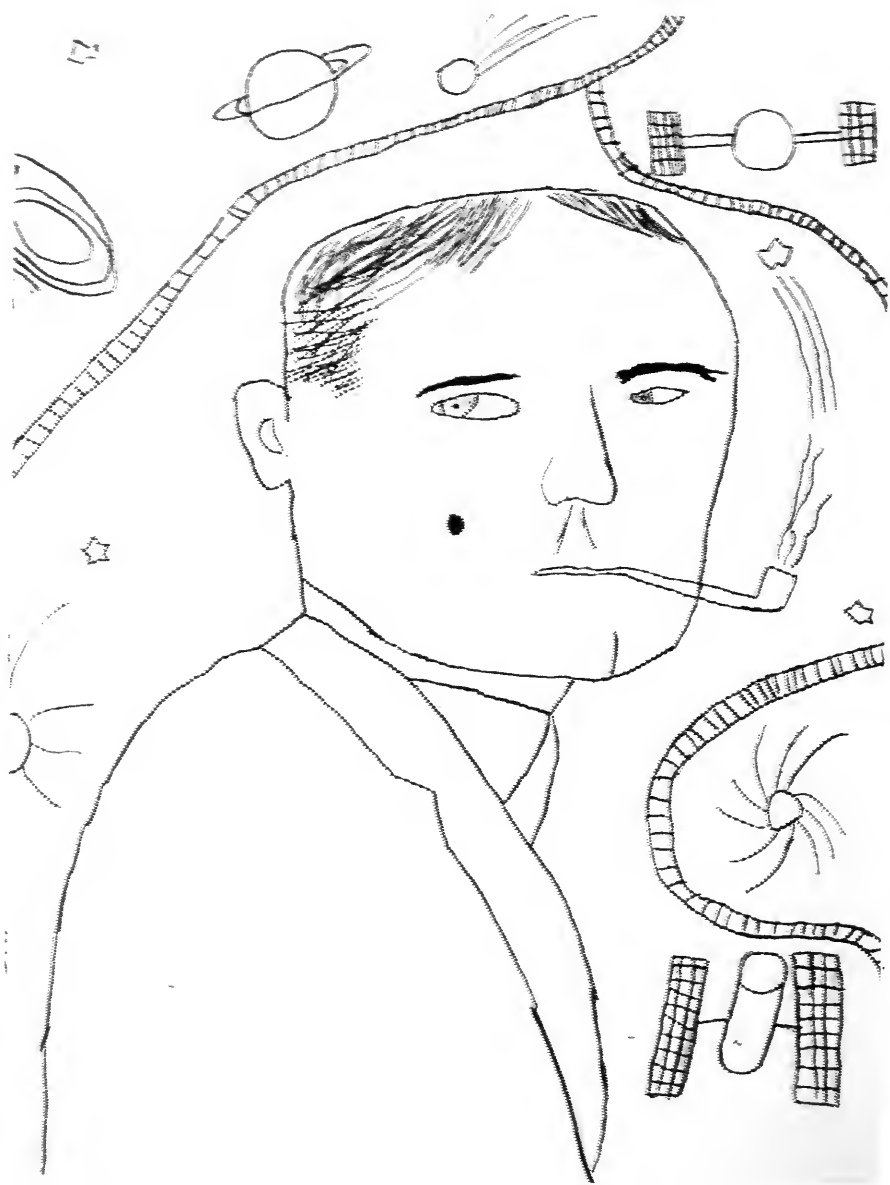
Our lives are but instruments  
Tuning to harmonize  
Into one vast tone poem.  
The first movement begins,  
As in a womb, a heartbeat –  
One's etude starts.  
We play progressions  
Which develop into preludes  
Of more noteworthy works.

The tempo increases.  
As the exposition concludes, we  
Wade into the development.  
Resonating a more mature timbre  
We feel the passion of a bolero,  
The sadness of an elegy.  
No more clack, cling,  
And dissonant drudgery;  
Like a soaring arpeggio we touch its melody  
And know.

Yet life's intermezzo  
Slams into us.  
Its staccato of crises  
Questions  
Like a lone bassoon's bellow.

Love is life's sonata  
Slipping into a serenade of emotions.  
We feel the power of a symphony,  
No longer a series of impromptu solos.  
We are whole.

Now the piece begins.  
Euphony envelops the hall with  
Music's incense  
Wafting through my memories.  
A Chopin's nostalgic nocturne  
Touches my soul  
And I ponder the end –  
Requiem awaits us in a Dies irae.



*Hubble Rehman Manji*



## **A Garden in Queens**

I look into an old photo, and see not a photo,  
but a window into the past.

I see my father untarnished by time,  
and the grandfather I never knew.

Back in a time when Eagle clashed with Bear,  
the two sit in a garden in Queens.

Surrounded by foliage, the two pose,  
frozen in time, specimens preserved in amber.

Looking into the eyes of my father,  
Those same eyes wished me sweet dreams last night,  
strange to think they once belonged to a boy.

In my grandfather's gaze, I see something different,  
a strong visage masking a troubled mind.

Grieving for the fall of Lithuania,  
and the struggle to survive in America.

With these two pairs of eyes looking at me,  
I see something I could never otherwise have seen,  
I see my father untarnished by time,  
and the grandfather I never knew.



Bohr Jason Lau

## **To Live**

On a dreary afternoon, foggy and wet,  
I sit and examine the world.

My thoughts travel wildly through space,  
arriving finally on the question of life.

Existence is such a curious thing;  
at times so wonderful, at others awful.

Long have I sat and pondered life,  
seeking patterns, seeking logic.

This end though still somehow eludes me,  
existence denying all categorization.

...Why am I?

My head fills with such questions,  
and answers are scarce as Pearls.

To live, to be, indeed to die;  
all must be done on faith alone.

When questions are many, and answers few,  
there is not much left but to sing.

James Shannon

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## A World Apart

I threw my arms in the air, not in celebration, but to stretch my muscles. My waking at this time of day was prolonged because of the brevity of my sleep, our departure for holidays fresh in my mind.

The hiss of the radiator accompanied my father's entrance. His fatigue was evident: his eyes were blood red, his usually tidy and combed hair had become unruly and spiked, and his actual height an apparent three inches shorter because of his slouch. My mother and brother, always early risers, were already eating. I heard their voices from the kitchen. Then my dad fulfilled his purpose: "Son..." he groaned, "time to get up."

The dry air had parched my throat and my lips refused to obey, but they moved to agree.

I unfurled my blankets and navigated my way through the mess of my room. In the bathroom, squinting, I opened the lights. I filled the sink until I could see that the ice cold water had reached the brim; I cupped my hands to drink a mouthful. As soon as it reached my lips my dulled senses came alive once more and my body woke. Then I took more of it and splashed it on my face, thus completing this phase of my morning. We had a plane to catch; I was awake. I often underestimated how useful that tap could be.

*I couldn't understand why there was a lack of activity at the beach. Everyone seemed immobile, simply standing around waiting. They were all looking out to sea. In the distance I saw fishing boats bobbing. As my eyes scanned the coastline in either direction I noticed that the people on most other beaches had the same vacant, expecting look on their faces, as if they all knew something was coming. There were explosions, the ground shook, and the beachgoers began to jump, as if their bodies had become more alert. I heard my parents calling my name.*

When I arrived at the River Kwai Hotel in Thailand, I was already weary of the local tea, which was not only hotter than the weather outside but seemed to make me even thirstier. The sun bore down as I walked under palms trees; across a flat space, a family formed a circle near the water, looking at something. Nothing was cold in Thailand.

I realized that my life was so routine, so lacking excitement, that not even this hotel could change it.

*They called my name in the distance. I turned to see my parents running towards me, screaming something indiscernible. All around me people had followed suit. In the distance I heard cars crashing, trucks toppling, and people screaming. I turned and saw that the water on the beach had receded to expose coral of all sorts, open to the air for the first time. As my eyes looked up I saw the source of fear: a massive wall of water speeding towards me.*

That second day of our trip we had scheduled with a tourist-driven operation called Thailand Trails. They offered guides through “rich jungle environments.” Evidently this meant that their website was more exciting to navigate than the trail on which they were going to guide us. I also thought that this was an extremely naïve outing, for my sister, Amanda, was only seven and she had never had the energy required for anything other than the absolute necessary. Cormac, my brother, was still only five and hardly qualified as a rugged mountaineer.

Following a hyperbolic familiarization video, we set out. The trek itself was painfully fast; it seemed that my family was not so energy-lacking after all. The ground that we covered was rigid and hard. With each step taken the crusty flakes of earth released a cloud of dust that clogged my nostrils and slowed my progress. I asked to slow down the pace and tried to cadge a drink of my brother’s water, my bottle abandoned in the hotel room. My parents chided me for my carelessness, withholding the water to underscore their point. I struggled to keep pace with the family; I felt my breathing slow and my mind drifting off, and I fell.

*I awoke in the sunlit hotel room. I couldn’t swallow and struggled to open my dusty eyes, and heard snatches of commentary as the hotel doctor departed: “Dehydrated... heat stroke... nothing to worry about.”*

My parents’ concern struck me as hollow, and they quickly prepared to descend to the beach, hoping to salvage the day for my siblings. I heard the door shut before I could croak out an apologetic call. I felt a rush of cool air engulf my senses and I experienced the awakening that I’d so wanted. I heard the rhythmic sound of the waves on the shoreline and gathered my things: the searing heat of the paving stones accelerated my pace towards the beach.

*The wave advanced with white caps blowing off the top and a crystal clear water face gleaming in the sun. I saw it grow larger and larger as the massive wall loomed closer to shore. The beach had been vacated by people hastily leaving all*

*manner of toys and things behind. My breath became short once more and it slowed my progress as I fell behind my family who ran towards false safety. I could feel the spray of the water on my back and then my breath was taken away and I was engulfed by the blue water as it filled every crevice.*

My father was perched beside the pool, tossing Cormac in the air. Their faces expressed pure joy as he threatened to tip Cormac into the water. The rays of the sun beat down on me as I read. My father asked me whether I would like to help him, his face slowly losing its smile as I replied that my book was too good to put down. His helping hands returned to throwing Cormac into the air and catching him, my father's confidence a perfect balance to my brother's trust.

*I opened my eyes to see a pale blue all around me. My arms and legs flailed frantically. I opened my mouth but felt only the cold water in my nostrils and my lungs. As I moved towards the surface I could see my surroundings getting clearer. Then my legs felt heavy, and something moved past me, someone calling. Kicking, I reached the top and took in a breath of air, and then began to sink, but as I stuck out my weakened hand I felt a strong one pull me up and out of the water.*

I woke once again in the River Kwai hotel. This time, though, the walls were torn and the ceiling non-existent. I saw sky through the framework of the building, birds circling, clouds. I heard the wave, more quietly now, but mixed with voices below us. The bed was damp and soggy. I looked up and saw my father's face that contained a mixture of worry and relief. There were wet tears glistening in his eyes.

## **Caught in a Drift**

Come and relax now put your troubles down  
No need to bear the weight of your worries  
Just let them all collapse into thin air

Or am I only just origami?  
Folded up and just imaginary  
Demented as the motives in your head

I smelled you on my shirt today, my soul  
Yours to steal let the tears splash upon you  
Heavy as stone and a bone-chilling cold  
My head aches glaringly, warped and tied up  
I need to kill this pain, my mind in knots  
My stomach churns in concern constantly  
For what I might do or what I have done  
Conquered fear to climb, a flash froze in time  
A grin of sweet flowers lifeless and taint  
Black tears stain the cheeks before admired  
I crack a window and feel the cool air,  
Cleansing every pore on my body  
Real life tends to play some tricks on the brain

Intoxicate moving wine to plain tears  
Drinking it deep, sometimes busted thoughts  
With each turn comes a brand new frame of mind  
If I could frame my mind, where would it hang?

Ryan Egger

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## Merrows

*Within the murmur o' the nicht  
I heard a merrow's cry;  
Sae lyk the v'ice o' sweet delicht  
That lang's tae kiss the sky-Kissock*

Not so long ago in the land that some may call the green isle ran a river. It wound its way through the rolling mountains of this misty isle. In some places it was a rushing river, others a quiet stream slipping by unnoticed. In one place, it was an amalgamation of the two. Here the river flowed lazily through its steep banks the site of many a fisherman's naps. In this such place lived a man, Mickey Mchennesy.

Now Mickey could hardly be called a man. He was more like a god to the ladies of this fair village, but along with his gift of good looks came vanity, unbeknownst to any god. Not only was his vanity unsurpassable but his tongue was fissilingual and janiform towards his fellow man. Besides these atrocious traits, he was also lazy, lazier in fact than the river itself which wound its way through the small town. So more often than not, one would find Mickey upon the rivers steep banks gazing at his own reflection, contemplating what evil words of mischief he could cook up to rile the peace-loving townsfolk.

On one of these days when he was gazing at his reflection wondering what special brew his mother must've taken to make him so gorgeous (for she was a contemptible nag). He heard a sound. There, like a shimmering nimpholepsy a women's beautiful head was peering at him from the reeds. Upon noticing Mickey's gaze, the young woman's head quickly submerged itself beneath the surface. Mickey, now interested (for she had been a very beautiful woman, at least her head was) crawled closer to the edge of the river and peered into the murky depths of the river flowing by. For hours he watched the water for another sign of the beautiful woman but there were none. Frustrated and sore he went home which was not such a strenuous journey for his house was just bordering the river. That night while he tossed and turned in his sleep, he heard a wailing cry coming from the river running near his window. Harkening to the window he peered into the darkening gloom laying about the land like a blanket. With the moonlight reflecting off the water he was unsure if he had seen a pale beautiful face bobbing in the water.

Ev'ry morn after that night he would go and rest by the river hoping to catch sight of the strange maiden. He was never again graced by her presence in the light of day. But



each night, he heard her strange otherworldly cry. It so preoccupied him, that his friends began to notice the change.

"The lad's got something on his mind but I kennit tell 't 'tis quite true," was the general agreement throughout the town. The creature's strange cries playing in his ears finally made his mind up to try and surprise the strange maiden during the dark of night. That night when the moon itself had not yet risen, and the pots of milk had been put out for the fair folk. He crept down to the edge of the river carrying a net and waited. He hadn't waited long for when rising out of the murky depths shone a pale moonlit face. Reaching with his net he took a hold of the woman but quickly realized his mistake. For this was no ordinary female bather but, a merrow! Now I know I needn't tell you what a merrow is but let me explain anyways.

A merrow is a creature of Celtic folklore. The female merrow (*mulrúhghach*), also called a mermaid (*muríoch*) or a sea-maiden (*maighdean mhara*), is lovely and graceful. She has the tail of a fish and web-like scales between her fingers. Her haunting voice often leads sailors to their doom. Now one may ask what a mermaid was doing so far away from the sea in an inland river. The answer is simple. While chasing a school of fish she became lost and slowly traveled up the river (for this river flowed down to the ocean, like all good rivers should) towards the spot where poor Mickey McHennessy had just realized the great fallacy of his actions and was being pulled under by a half-woman half-fish. But before he could react he was already under the water and face to face with one of the most beautiful creatures he had yet to see. With a wink and flash the mermaid was off, pulling the net and poor Mickey McHennessy behind her. For you see that is another peculiarity of the sea maidens: they find sport in toying with the lives of humans. The mermaid would pull Mickey along until his lungs were just about to burst and then she would let him up for air again, just to drag him back to the depths of the now-frothing river to play their little game of follow the leader. Finally, on one of these trips to the surface Mickey was able to wrench himself free of the fishing net and pull himself onto the shore collapsing with exhaustion. The mermaid merely laughed her high, haunting laugh that drove so many to their deaths. She slipped back between the rippling surfaces of the river leaving Mickey nearly unconscious with fatigue, unable to move.

And this is where his neighbors found him early the next morn murmuring to himself still sodden with the first light's dew. Although they never did find out what had happened to him that night, they did notice a change in his spirit. He no longer lay lazily about staring at his reflection but became a good working man.

Some people say that by the light of the moon one can still see old Mickey McHennessy standing by the river gazing into its depths, searching, but still, keeping well away from its steep banks.

*Tristano Tenaglia*

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## **Sonnet 88**

### **Ageless Fusion**

Music transcends boundaries of thineself.  
Feeding people endless light and hope.  
Unlike a painting it colors itself,  
With melodies, lyrics, a single note!

Each note, its own place in the universe.  
From the innocence of a mockingbird,  
To the wrath of a mysterious curse.  
Music breaks oneness, flows you to the herd.

Up and down the emotions are flying,  
Tickling the black and white soul of passion.  
I, deceived by music? Never lying!  
Oh! Ageless notes, never out of fashion.

Bedeviled and beguiled, trance-like I lie,  
Waiting for the moment inspiration dies.

**FIRST PLACE**  
**GRADE 9**

*James Shannon*

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## **Ocean Rising**

The fortunate chance upon this ocean,  
Travelling through hardships on its rising  
Swells. Brave men, sails taut, have coiled the screaming  
Winds, but ventured on in blind devotion.

Ships have sunk, boats have toppled, men have drowned;  
Rewards for passage ensure the attempt.  
Blatant madness is ignored with contempt,  
And tales told of fallen men never found.

Loved ones wait on shore, crying in their hands.  
Men's motives for attempt are transparent;  
Their stupidity remains apparent.  
But they must go, for cowards stay on land.

The years go by without word of success.  
May paradise wait? It's anyone's guess.

**SECOND PLACE**  
**GRADE 9**

*Geoff Lundell-Smith*

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## **Into the Blue**

The sky, it falls away in azure blue.  
It's gone, and now the line is a black snake.  
Escape from heat, the sun above, it bakes  
a rip, a tear in space. I'm diving through.

Graceful motion, in one single moment  
to glide, to move through space, without worry of  
gripping, jealous, the hands, the claws of earth.  
Breath comes, desire for air, welling, 'tis torment.

Ascend quickly the world: liquid sapphire.  
First kick, then stroke, kick, stroke, go fast, harder.  
The world reversed, the flip must be smarter.  
Halfway has past and now muscles like fire.

Now see the flags, and they zip by, are gone.  
A stroke, grasp at the wall: heaven, race done.

**SECOND PLACE**  
**GRADE 9**

*Vinay Desai*

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## **Hello, Goodbye**

Dusk of evening on a December night,  
Waiting and watching with a book in hand;  
A shadow lurked in the dark of the light.  
Pass'ng by the Dakota, he took a stand,  
The victim had come from the studio;  
This man was famous for all of his songs.  
The assassin stopped swarming to and fro;  
This man was famous for one of his wrongs.

Frozen and cold, out came the horri'c gun,  
The shooter has seen his target in face;  
The man knows that he has nowhere to run  
The shooter knows that he is a disgrace.  
Goodbye Mr. Lennon, for I must go,  
But before I kill you, you must say hel'o.

**THIRD PLACE  
GRADE 9**

*Patrick Levy*

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## **The Difference I Make**

**SECOND PLACE OVERALL, COMMONWEALTH COMPETITION**

One summer day, not long after my twelfth birthday, I was home alone and bored. I surfed the T.V. channels from soap operas to game shows, from news programs to sitcoms, not capable of giving any show more than few seconds of my attention. As the variety of images flashed before my eyes, I happened upon Second World War footage. I'm not sure why, but I stopped my incessant clicking of the remote, and began to watch the antique film. Even though the grainy black and white scene somehow seemed unrealistic when compared to Hollywood special effects, I felt captivated. The planes flew stealthily across the black canvas of the night and quietly dropped their bombs on the sleeping city below. It was eerily silent until the buildings burst into a fiery cloud of smoke and flames. Funny, I thought, it seemed like an absurd upside-down firework display. The picture become hazier and the drone of the airplanes faded into the darkness. I felt uneasy by what I had seen, even though I couldn't quite make out what had happened.

The scene then switched to a wrinkled face describing his experience in the RCAF. I was ready to change the channel once again when my grandfather entered the room. He shuffled his slippered feet towards the armchair, and sat down facing the television. "What you watching there, kiddo?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing really," I replied jadedly. The T.V. returned to the air raid clip. "That's during the war," my grandfather said, his eyes lighting up. "I was there, you know," he said proudly. Although I had heard countless stories about Grandpa's service in the military, I had never paid much attention to what seemed to belong to an irrelevant time and place. But today was different. Was I really that bored, or had the flickering images on the screen made me want to understand how my own family had been involved?

"Grandpa, tell me about it," I said eagerly.

He remembered a time when war ravaged the world, and recounted how a fierce battle raged between good and evil. The Nazis sought to conquer the globe while the beleaguered Allied forces were determined to uphold freedom. After a long and bloody struggle, we finally prevailed. The story was fascinating and I couldn't help thinking that it reminded me of a movie I had recently seen. But there was

something in my grandfather's story more real than anything on a screen. As he spoke, I felt a cold chill over my bones like a winter wind. A certain darkness in his voice made his words disturbing. I felt he wanted to tell me something I was not capable of understanding. Something I had never known.

"Even though I was just a kid," he said, "I realized that I had to do something." His face turned pale and his voice got softer. "Everything I knew to be good had become tainted with the threat of evil. Suddenly, I stopped being a child and was forced into the real world. I knew I had a responsibility to make a difference," he said, his voice finding vigour. I didn't know how to respond to the jargon of "real world" and "making a difference." My own life seemed petty and insignificant. No one called on me to confront the evils of mankind or to alter the fate of humanity. I was content living my life without worrying about the horror of war, the fear of enemies or the sorrow of losing friends. There had always been an impregnable barrier between me and the atrocities of the world. Television was my only window into misery, but one which I fully controlled with a flick of the remote. As long as I never personally experienced these emotions, I could not fully grasp my grandfather's stories. But why would I want to understand them anyways? For the time being, all I wanted was to continue being a child.

I didn't mind having Grandpa around. He had gotten sick just a month before, and had to move in with us. Our summer vacation to the beach was cancelled, but my parents had promised we'd make it up next year. As disappointed as I was, I quickly forgot about it. Living with Grandpa turned out better than I had expected. Although we had visited him on holidays, I had never really gotten to know him. He was just the relative who slipped the most cash into birthday cards. But by living with him that idle summer, he became the most significant figure in my life. Alone together, we were buddies who loved playing cards, watching baseball games and constantly joking around. But there was also the darkness of Grandpa's war stories. Those times, there was something chilling in his gaze. It was as though everything he had witnessed was being projected through his eyes onto me. His soft voice blew like an icy wind. "Kid," he said with a gentle sigh, "you don't begin to appreciate life until you've faced death. As much as I would have liked to ignore the evil going on, it grew to the point that I knew our very existence was being threatened."

The summer days raced by like seconds; school began in no time. Before I knew it, the autumn leaves were falling. Summer ceased to linger in the air. The doctor said that Grandpa was getting better and that he might be able to go home soon. However, he seemed to always be tired and didn't have the energy to fool around anymore. He spent most of the days resting in his bedroom. My parents

assumed he was just old and liked to sleep, but I worried about him. One night, I passed his room and noticed there was a light on inside. After I knocked a couple times, I slowly opened the creaky door. Seeing no one there, I curiously looked around at my grandfather's things. There was a pile of magazines by his bedside, an assortment of medicine bottles by the window sill and an old photo album on top of his neatly made bed. I flipped through the worn pictures and saw images of my grandfather as a child celebrating Christmas, going to school and playing with his friends. Then there was an abrupt change. The rest of the pictures were of Grandpa in an army uniform with guns, tanks and fighter planes. A shadow lurked from the doorway and moved into the room.

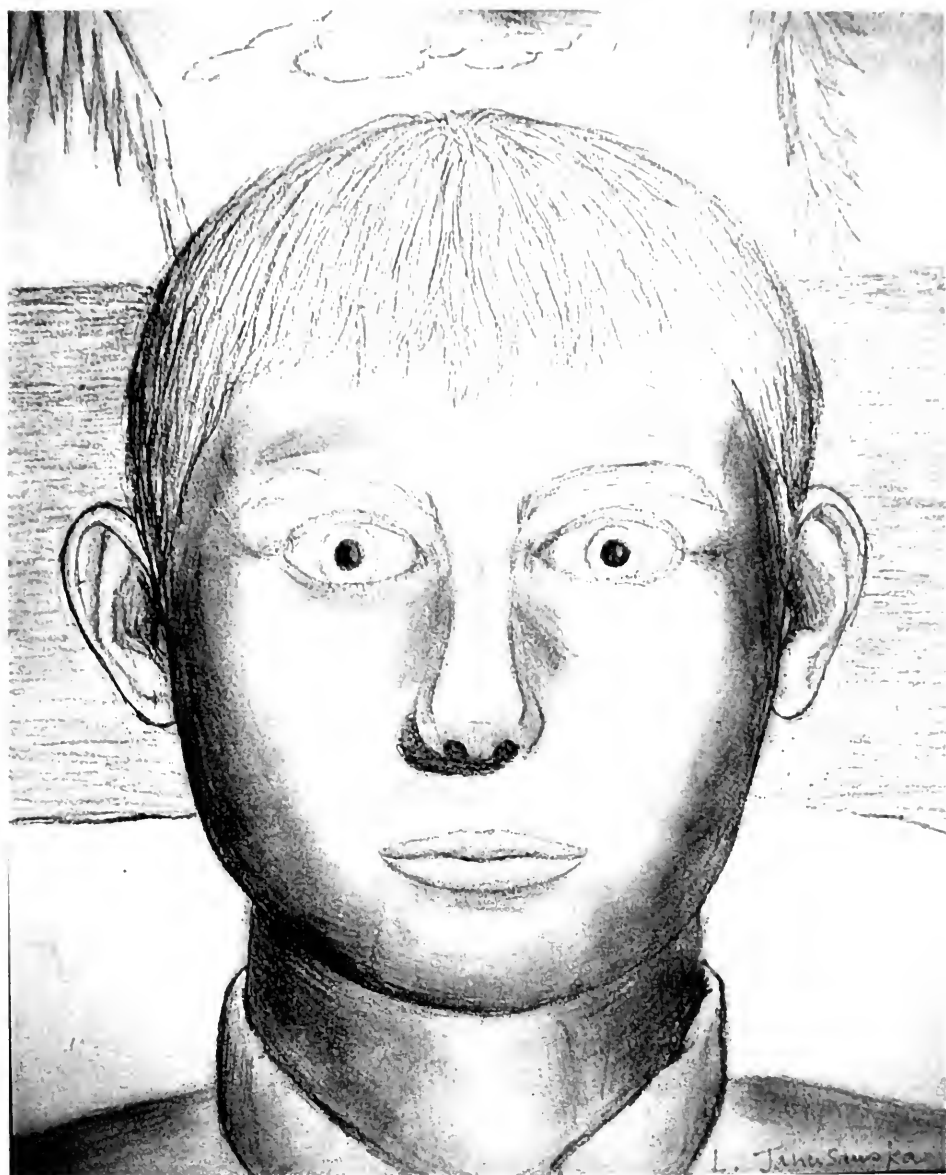
"Grandpa!" I gasped.

"Hey kiddo, I didn't mean to startle you." he said smiling kindly. "You were looking at my old photos, weren't ya?" he asked. "Don't worry about it. I want you to keep them" he said affectionately, "I'm getting better and I'm ready to go home. I packed my suitcase and I'll be on my way in the morning. But I want you to have those photos. Promise me you'll never forget what I've taught you." I thanked him for the album and wished him a good trip home. Although I didn't quite understand what he wanted me to promise, I said I would anyways.

It snowed fiercely that night and a white blanket buried the dead leaves. The house rocked with the howling wind and cradled me to sleep. I listened to the roar of the storm in my dreams while the snowflakes gently drifted on earth. I was awakened around midnight by the scream of a siren. I leapt out of bed and went toward the flashing red glow coming from my window. Blinded by the thick snowfall, I couldn't make out where the alarming light was coming from. In a state of fright, I ran out the open front door into the storm. My father grabbed me and held me against his chest. "It's Grandpa. He's not well", my mother wept. As the ambulance drove off into the unknown, I felt the cold winter wind chill over my bones for the last time. That night my grandfather died.

After his passing, I finally understood what he had been trying to tell me. My Grandpa, like so many other brave Canadians, had made a difference on the battlefield. Thankfully, my generation has not been called to such sacrifice. But I too, make a difference by the simple act of remembrance. I had promised him that I would remember the Second World War. Not as a set of dates, old photographs or even as a horrific death count. No, because of him, I would remember that freedom belongs only to those prepared to defend it.





*Self Portrait* Leo Janusauskas

## Requiem for 2040 South Ocean Drive

**D**ried food forms a filthy crust on the dishes from yesterday's lunch with the pool ladies. Decay wafts in pungent waves off damp dish rags, spotty with food deposits. For all we know, tomorrow's wonder drug festers silently in my grandmother's makeshift kitchen laboratory. In the meantime, Bubby's hope for humanity remains piled high in the sink, higher than Babel.

Although never the tidiest of women, my grandmother has approached a level of sloth which is—I have to give her this—admirable in its extreme. I wonder to myself: how do they do it? Old people I mean. How do they manage to fit together the scattered puzzle pieces of their dwindling lives? Bubby's condo is a study in entropy, and the remains of the day lie scattered about like so much soiled laundry: Shuffleboard queues, groceries from Publix, a wet bathing suit full of salt flung carelessly over a towel rail like some briny sea carcass breathing its last. Sand and chlorine lie in small puddles on the floor beneath, along with some seashells in a dripping Ziploc bag and Bubby's latest steal from Loehman's Plaza. Unkempt and unaccounted for, these are the puzzle pieces of Bubby's latter-day life.

There are two things Bubby has always been infamous for. One is her ever-undying compulsion for shopping, whose excessiveness flew in the face of my non-materialistic youth. As a young boy disinterested in anything but baseball cards and Tonka trucks, Bubby would drag me and my grandfather to the mall and lay her hands on anything she could touch, cleaning out my grandfather's wallet, which was, mere hours earlier, stuffed to the brim. This was when I would routinely interject in a way as witty as any six-year-old boy could, saying "she has the shopping disease, Zeide."

The other is a more serious one—Bubby suffers from a speech impediment whose sounds can be experienced nowhere else on the planet, with the possible exception of the Kalahari desert amongst the !Klung Bushmen. To wit, Bubby's words are interspersed with a series of clicks and sucking sounds, similar to those of the whale or dolphin. "How do you like this suck-suck-click just-em steal? Two sizes too just-em big, but look, it's just you-know-what just-em Versace," she will say. And as she clicks and sucks and improvises this long-suffering game of charades, I can't help but wish that I went skiing for winter break instead. "So Mom thought you'd just em' suck-click-suck like spending your break at the Parker," she muses reflectively. What can I say? My grandmother can complete the Sunday *New York Times* cross-

word puzzle in pen and answer Jeopardy questions with the lightning speed of an idiot savant, but to hear her tortured version of Bushman speech you'd think she's a cross between Billy Bibbit and Forrest Gump. My Mom and uncles joke—only amongst themselves of course—that long before Spielberg popularized the character, they had their own home version of E.T., who through a series of interplanetary Morse code, was clicking and sucking her long-suffering heart out all in the efforts to signal her alien confreres to come and take her back home. In a way, it's a consolation to think that somewhere in this universe, there's a place where Bubby would be understood.

My nose is like that of a bloodhound. Chlorine— it enters my nostrils as I inhale the salty sweet tears of Atlantic dreams. Then Uncle Billy comes down. He's the black sheep of family— the one who spits on old people eleven floors below for amusement when every other young person my age struggles to keep this antisocial impulse in check, permitting ourselves this guilty pleasure just once a year on a dateless New Year's Eve. Yet balcony-spitting is merely Uncle Billy's warm-up act. Get him going, and he'll verbally assassinate anyone not within spitting distance.

In his late thirties, he still lives with his mother, whom he fights with as if they were an old married couple. Yeah, Billy's a regular Oedipus Rex. He knows how to get her by the soft parts, and is the only one in the family low enough to ridicule her speech. As Bubby chokes and splutters, Billy circles over his prey, waiting patiently for the third or fourth suck until he finally lets out: "I'm too old to play goddamn charades anymore! Just kill me already, why don't you!" My grandmother must have died a million deaths like these by now, and how and why she tolerates her socially-challenged parasite of a son is beyond me. We all know it's because Billy's gay and has his own ball of wax to deal with. Still, I sometimes think it's only a matter of time before one or both of them flies off the twenty-first balcony in a screaming, spluttering, clicking and sucking tangle of arms and legs.

Although a big shot in his own dimmed mind, he's never had a job, or at least one he has held down for more than a year. Perhaps it is his flamboyant demeanor and offensive manner that cost Billy his jobs. He will seldom meet a person whom he respects, or at least whom he acts respectfully to. When my family would treat him out to lunch for some Rascal House or Bagel Cove, you were able to bet anything that he would address the waiter as "boy," or in the case that it was a woman who was serving us, "doll face" or "sweetheart" would fit the bill. It is this so-called charm that Uncle Billy radiates in his own demented mind that has gotten him his job as the condo building's realtor.

"So how was your just em' morning, Billy," Bubby will stammer inquisi-

tively. "Did you make any just em' sales?" You can see the answer in Billy's stony face, but that is not enough for him. He needs to have something snappy to say, something that makes him feel as special as he can be. After all, it is only in America where the bum can become king—and that is what Billy is in his head: King. He is king of the castle, king of the Parker Plaza, heir to the Copoloff throne and fortune, which I'm sure has shriveled due to its needing to support him as well as Bubby's shopping disease. "What are you asking me that for?" he will ask. "You mention the name Billy Copoloff to anyone in Hallandale, they'll know it." This is his dream—to be revered as the Condo King of Hallandale Beach; to have his name built up without having to do the work. This is his American dream.

I can never tolerate his act for more than a few minutes, and so I leave them in the gilt and marble Louis XVI lobby and take the elevator up to the apartment. Shoes are scattered, beds unmade. The dishes from the get-together are still piled high. The groceries haven't been put away yet, and sand still lines the linoleum as if the beach party I wasn't at had come to visit me, just for me, at Bubby's. What is it that brings everyone to this common point at one time or another in their life? Feeling cluttered, I go out onto the balcony and gaze forward to The Hemispheres, which mark the beginnings of Hollywood Beach. I try to see beyond The Hemispheres to The Diplomat but I can't; buildings like the one I'm in block the stream of vision, in this moment when I'm trying to figure out what's really going on. Try as I might, I still can't see beyond the Hemispheres, which will eventually come towering down due to their old age, like everyone in this building.

People come here, perhaps, because they're lost. Uncle Billy and Bubby are no exception, but I can't help but wonder whether I am as well.

The Buick is at the halfway point of its life. It's Bubby's winter car for when she comes down here, for four or five months a year. People like her come down here from up North like clockwork—once the calendar hits November they're out of there. It's this hibernation of the elderly that I find so comical. The car's dirty, and I refuse to clean it like every other issue my mother or anyone else in her family has tried to tidy up for her. This car's mess can only be cleaned up when Bubby finds her resolve, which everyone in the family prays will be soon enough.

Bubby is not exactly the health nut that some of her condo friends are. I guess anyone would be able to see that by walking into her disheveled apartment. She's still a dedicated smoker. She sits at the pool cocooned in a mushroom cloud of smoke, paperback in hand, killing herself. She smells of smoke and coffee and no matter what she tries to cover it up with, the sour smell of burnt tobacco oozes out of her, because no matter what the rule prevails: Old people fall apart.

There's nowhere to drive, nowhere to go and nowhere to flee. Florida is, although never stated out in the open, a place people go when they know they're nearing the end. It's almost as if Bubby has cast herself off onto that metaphorical ice floe to sail away along with her mess, paperback edition of *Watership Down* and a carton full of cigarettes. It's like she's dead already, and I live in her stead, waving goodbye as the current carries her away, and vaguely from what is now distance, I see fire. Bubby is not sending out a distress signal with that, nor trying to transmit a message to her brethren on "The Green Planet," but rather sucking a Marlboro, burning her lungs, as I smell the bitter and the ever more faint scent of nicotine polluting the air.

Back at the balcony, I stare out against the strip, diners and malls and high-rises with their penthouses where deities must reside with their clear views toward the ocean and city. Yet, the Hemispheres are not going to be there for long, and are in the midst of waving a hail-Mary to their stance overlooking the beach. A crane carries a wrecker ball which will soon meet with the Hemispheres. God comes down from the machine. When the iron finally hits, the building comes towering down to the sizzling, sun-burnt concrete ground. A clear view that was never there becomes accessible, sporting the ocean, sand and beach cabanas. Dogs are running along the boardwalk, their owners trying to keep up with their racy pace, while giggling children in sandals are eating ice cream, jolting up and down the beach, and finally, charging towards the ocean, diving in, swimming on towards the fading, gray horizon.

The old fall, the new rise, and the ocean cries blue waves full to its grainy brink. They surface and make camp on the beach, waiting for people to come inhale the salty-sweet tears of the Atlantic, which breed in the minds of people like Bubby and Billy, and only broken bottles, and a few man of war have washed up to the sand. There is no message in a bottle, no newly found purpose or dream or meaning that has drifted ashore rhythmically, along with the mournful and saddened waves. The beach dwellers pack up their straw mats and towels as the sun sets, the horizon turning pink and blue and purple, shedding its grey, as they take the elevators to their penthouses, as the waves still pour in lost tears. It has now gone dark on Hallandale Beach and only dirt is left along its seedy shores. So I set sail, drifting away on my ice floe, struggling against the undertow, waving dramatically back on the shore's lost dreams.

## On Education

One of the people who had a great influence on me was my grade-eight History teacher: he always seemed to have a sort of intangible wisdom. I clearly recall one occasion, while chastising someone for not having completed the assigned homework, he stated, with great insight, that there is nothing wrong with being stupid: if one is stupid, people will have pity—and there are entire institutions dedicated to the caretaking of mentally deficient patients. The problem, he said, arises if one is lazy; no one will have pity for one's idleness, one will be shunned by the productive members of society and left to writhe in one's festering sloth. This memorable vociferation uncannily underlines the flaws in the contemporary educational system: we are implementing education as a panacea to stupidity, when we should be counteracting laziness.

For what, indeed, is education? An industrialist might argue that education is the mechanism used to forge the human resource base; a Marxist would see it as the means to prepare the proletariat for revolution; yet others would describe education as a way of readying individuals to become productive members of society. All of these abstractions are quite beside the point: education focuses on the instruction and enlightenment of the person, notwithstanding any benefit to some greater purpose. It must be clear that society is the subject of education, not the object. I seek to emphasize this because it has come to my attention that many people have the strange idea that public institutionalized education in general resembles an assembly line, wherein each student is fitted with (taught) predetermined parts (knowledge) according to a grand design (standardized curriculum). In the end, every person ostensibly emerges as a finished product—equipped with all the tools necessary to begin life in society. This abhorrent theory

contributes to two fallacious presumptions to which I vehemently object: the first being the conceptualization of education as an object which can be simply imparted; and the second the idea that education can cure stupidity by adding knowledge. Therefore, as far as my own answer to the question of the nature of education is concerned, I am reminded of a poignant quotation of William Butler Yeats's: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." In assuming this perspective, I will establish the reasons why the assembly-line theory fails, the refutation to its premises, and the attitude which must be adopted if education is to fulfill its purpose of combating idleness.

Firstly, on the literal level, how does one differentiate the filling of a pail from the lighting of a fire? The answer is simple chemistry: filling a pail is a physical translation; it entails only the displacement of particles, without chemically altering their nature. Conversely, lighting a fire requires combustion, wherein atoms and molecules are rearranged to yield completely different products. Extending this idea to the notion of education, it is equally clear that, for learning to occur, a change must arise beyond the mere acquiring of information. Using the brain as a pail accomplishes nothing: one does not become a mathematician by memorizing decimals of Pi. Instead, one must mold the brain into a tool capable of processing information in a useful manner—being able to derive complex logical proofs based on simple axioms, to continue the mathematical example—and that molding process is the very nature of education: a fundamental change—a fire. Consequently, education necessitates the capability to change, and that is why education cannot effectively counteract stupidity—which is, by definition, the lack of a capacity to acquire and apply knowledge—in short the inability to mentally change. Moreover, this explains why the assembly-line model of education fails: it works on the false assumption that every student will undergo the necessary change in the same way as each other student, and, therefore, it generally only teaches one approach. (To whomsoever would challenge that assertion, I have but to refer them to the Quebec provincial exams for Canadian History, which make use of only a very small variety of question formats). Thus, if education is indeed the lighting of a fire, then it is clearly unsatisfactory to perceive it in the narrow terms of information alone.

Beyond the technical definition, however, there lies a figurative reading of Yeats's phrase: a symbolic meaning. Fire, and the light it generates, has always been the manifestation of intelligence. From the dark ages—a term used to indicate a period of history devoid of scientific advancement—to the surrealist artists such as René Magritte—in whose paintings light and fire represent physical incarnations of the intelligentsia—to modern vernacular (e.g. to “shed light” on something means to clarify or explain it), the presence of a flame has always connoted inspiration and progress toward human edification. Thus, if education is the lighting of a fire, it is tantamount to the instilling of inspiration. This demonstrates that the lazy are the ideal candidates for the purposes of education: slothful people have the potential to accomplish; they simply lack the necessary stimulation. Through proper education, and the inspiration kindled thereby, lazy people can acquire motivation and better their quality of life as a result; whereas the stupid lack the capability to significantly mentally change, and thus could not benefit from education to the same degree. Thus, from the point of view that education is not the mundane filling of a pail but the

proactive lighting of a cognitive fire, it is easily concluded that the assembly-line model is entirely inadequate.

Thus I surmise that education is a tool suited for the betterment of the individual—that any attempt to metaphorically simplify it to a mechanical process is inherently inaccurate, that the currently popular point of view is fraught with error and ultimately unacceptable, and that resources used to educate would be much more efficiently spent were they to be focused on the inspiration of the lazy rather than the fruitless instruction of the stupid.



*Gavin Kenneally*

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## **At the Café**

The wind on the street flows through the concrete abyss  
The buildings cold, unwelcoming, unnatural  
in their dimension.  
While the inhabitants glide through  
the never-ending streets.

In a café, two old men talk,  
their words sorrow, nostalgia and lost opportunities  
free each other of past grief  
Of want, of need, of battles lost and won.  
Their stories of former glory warm and comfort  
their used souls.  
The men reminisce, their innermost emotions  
disguised as anecdotes,  
reveal sentiments of past  
glory  
and give them uncertain hope.

At a table across the room,  
a group of teens regale each other with tales  
of defining moments: rebellion, and brittle laughter  
dominate.  
The outer shell of confidence cracks and shifts  
under unknown possibilities lurking in the future.



*Hybrid Egg* William MacCulloch

## Egypt

**D**ecember 25, 2004, 1:30 a.m.—“Hamdila ‘al-salaam!” This was the first sentence I heard stepping into the shabby Alexandria airport under a star-speckled night sky. These words of welcome came from a cluster of bagmen that hurriedly made their way towards the recently disembarked passengers. They energetically whisked the luggage of the tired and encumbered travellers towards the exit. This enthusiasm with which they worked stemmed solely from their desire for baksheesh from which they earned the greater part of their income. Though their lives were simple and modest, they were, nonetheless, smiling, joking, and having a good time.

A little over a year ago, I had the chance to visit Egypt, a first for me. Born a Canadian of Egyptian parents, I was curious to explore and observe my country of origin. As I became immersed in the foreign land around me, I soon discovered that I loved everything about it. The ubiquitous dirt on the apartment buildings that discoloured the once white facades, the narrow streets that wouldn’t prove wide enough for an SUV but that nonetheless played host to two lanes of crazed traffic, all of it appealed to me instantly. I found myself surrounded by people whose objectives for the day, week, and year all involved Turkish coffee, Shisha, and backgammon, the country’s favourite pastime. Stress is unheard of, and the weather was consistently glorious. The food was unbelievable; being a devout lover of seafood, I was able to enjoy a wide-variety of fish of a freshness, preparation, and price unparalleled anywhere else in the world. It was a bizarre melange of the old and the new: an imperfect hybrid of its ancient history and the modern times. I had stumbled upon a paradise and promised myself then and there that the next visit to Egypt wouldn’t be too far down the road.

However, trouble was brewing in heaven. A few short months after returning home to Montreal, a series of bomb attacks in Sharm el-Sheikh killed nearly 90 people and injured more than a hundred. In fact, the hotel that had been levelled to the ground by one of the three bombs was none other than the one I had spent a magnificent week in during my stay in Egypt. Initially, I was stunned and at a loss to understand why people would ever want to bomb such a charming and innocent place. My confusion led me to ask question after question that turned into an all-out search for the truth.

The truth, as such, was to be discovered with a deeper understanding of politics. Politics had never appealed to me, particularly Canadian politics, which seem so uninteresting, unimportant, and unchanging. I knew that I should always have some vague notion of current political affairs, but never did I go beyond a superficial understanding. Conversely, the bombing at the resort encouraged me to research and look into the subject of the unrest in the Middle East. I began reading the newspaper regularly and studying the strife there in history class. What I learned didn't comfort me.

As most people know, the Middle East has been a stage of long-lasting turmoil for the past hundred years and, in all likelihood, will continue to be one for the next hundred years. Many factors drive this discord, such as the complicated historical and geo-political background of the area since the First World War. The evolution of the region and the make up of its population also play a big part in creating the current state of affairs. Moreover, the long standing lack of democracy and the desperation of fundamentalists and radical groups, whose desire it is to come to power and drive their own personal agendas, are more directly responsible for the violence and hostility.

What sparked my interest in learning more was an unfortunate and regrettable event, and though I have learned much since then, I've barely scratched the surface of this complicated and multifaceted conflict. It puzzles me that the most ancient region of the world that has given rise to so many religions and civilizations can be a scene of such extreme hostility and danger. In retrospect, I realise that I would never have been able to learn so much or stay interested in such a politically-oriented topic had my fascination not been piqued by the turmoil in the Middle East. The bombings at Sharm el-Sheikh led me to learn to have an appreciation for how complex, convoluted, and intricate the historical events are that shape the make-up of the society and its ideologies.

*Andrew Pancer*

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## **Confession**

I am blindly staring out the window  
at the bare trees draped in a bland, stark white.  
Grass hides under a frosted waterfall  
engraved with footprints everywhere you go.  
Snowflakes, differing one from each other,  
fall to the ground in the very same way,  
uplifted by the darkness of the winds,  
losing their way through the path of the air.  
Icicles grasp to the lifeless branches  
longing for a haven to call their home.  
Through the howling of the intrepid winds,  
I can hear the trembling voices nearing.  
I bury myself under the covers,  
trying to escape the noise from below.  
I can't tell them my feelings locked inside;  
they are caught up with their own emotions.  
I shed tears in the safety of my bed.  
When I asked why this was happening now,  
I was told that it was for my own good,  
unaware that their decision to split,  
would lead to my ultimate destruction.  
The storm outside reflects my unclear life,  
my body is chilled from a lack of warmth.  
Blinded by the complete unexpectant,  
my impending downfall has just begun.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Jonas Briedis** was born in Montreal, to an American father and a Canadian mother. He's spent his entire life in Montreal, most of it attending Selwyn House School. He loves to read and, even more, he loves to write. He has always enjoyed writing prose fiction, and more recently has become very interested in writing poetry.

**Kyle Burrows** is in Grade 11, and is looking forward to graduating.

**Nic Cabana** is the guy behind a lot of the great creative projects at Selwyn. He likes Japanese anime and culture. He dislikes the long train rides home.

**Kamran Chaudhry** is in grade 10. He has always been intrigued by samurai lore.

**Brendan Paul Cheong** was born February 24th, 1989 in Montreal. He currently lives in a two-story house in Westmount and attends Selwyn House School for his last year of high school. He plans on attending an art program at Sheridan College in Toronto.

**Vinay Desai**, 14, really enjoys all aspects of life. He enjoys sports such as soccer, football, golf, rugby and others. Although he is small, he is always trying to work at his best at everything and always enjoys helping others in need.

**Ryan Egger** grew up in a small farm not far from the terribly large city of Burlington, Vermont. He learned to read and write by candlelight before getting up at four in the morning to milk the cows. He now lives with his dog and his family on the border of deepest darkest Quebec in a small town called Montreal.

**Andrew Funamoto's** middle name, Yuki, is Japanese for "snow." He was born early on a typically-snowy December morning. He loves music and pretends not to love art.

**Ross Gelber** arrived at Selwyn last year and has enjoyed his short, but fruitful, time here.

**Will Harris** was born in Montreal. He has attended many rock concerts and he enjoys playing guitar. He has been known to write poetry under duress.

**Robert Hinrichsen** is an austere intellectual with a dry and highly political sense of humor. This is evident in the work presented herewith—his analytical treatise on education—wherein his ostentatious use of sardonicism could be misconstrued—by those unaware of his inflated ego—in such a way as to yield a potentially disturbing result.

**Leo Janusauskas** doodles while he listens and draws while he thinks. He is in grade 10 now, but not for long.

**Gavin Kenneally** is in grade 11. He is looking forward to beginning the Arts and Sciences Program at Marianopolis next year.

**Jason Lau** is graduating this year. He loves history, art and weekends.

**Patrick Levy** is 16 years old and still growing. He enjoys black and white films, scented candles and contact sports. Patrick is currently working on a rearrangement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony for the score of an urban interpretation of *The Gingerbread Man*. The best of Patrick Levy is yet to be seen.

**Brian Lin** loves music and basketball. He is looking forward to graduating in June.

**William MacCulloch** is a football-loving intellectual in the tenth grade.

**Rehman Manji** was born in Montreal on December 26, 1988. He enjoys golf and travel in his free time.

**Jon Mechanic**, born on April 21st 1989, has always stood out as an impassioned English student and creative writer. The former Expo bat boy is currently finishing his last year of High School.

**Sammy Mihalcioiu** was born in Halifax and raised in Winnipeg and recently moved to Montreal. This young writer is currently in Grade 10. He hopes to achieve international success with his poetry.

**Marc Minogue** was born in Montreal. Marc loves all sports, craisins and smoked meat sandwiches. He works hard in school, but is also known for humour.

**Andrew Pancer** is finishing grade 10 and looking forward to the summer.

**Ryan Quinn** is fifteen years old. He has lived in Montreal his whole life. He has a brother and two sisters. He loves all sports. He also loves music. He does decently well in school. He likes movies. He doesn't like being bored.

**Lawrence Said** grew up in the suburbs of Montreal with a bike and a lost imagination. He enjoys writing music for himself, and enjoys playing it for those willing to listen. As for writing, a word or an epic, it is instinct more than inspiration, which allows the soul to run free.

**James Shannon** was born on June 28, 1991 to Patrick and Paula Shannon. He is the oldest of three boys, which has ups and many downs. He is currently in grade 9 and is an avid hockey player. He lives out his life in hopes of raising a family and attending a prestigious university, although preferably not in that order.

At the age of four, **Tristano Tenaglia** had his first piano lesson, Suzuki style. He spent much of his time crawling under the piano as well as playing it. He realized that he loved the instrument and that he had a passion for it. At six, he was asked to play some of his repertoire on *Canada AM*. He recently took the Grade-Nine Royal Conservatory exams and passed with distinction. One of his dreams is to play at Juilliard.

**Andrew Zakhari** is confused and happy. He believes that he writes best about what is personal and interesting to him. Apart from that, what he values most is humour and justice.









